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CHAPTER 4

ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

"Downtown Blacksburg is the heart of Town. It is the geographic and cultural center, and historic center of commerce and business. Downtown gives Blacksburg its identity as a college town. It reflects Blacksburg's past in its shops and houses and by establishing the cultural center of the community."—Comprehensive Plan

GOAL

Support contiguous, pedestrian-friendly business and cultural development at the scale of adjacent residences extending from downtown along South Main Street. ~~and inclusive of pending, expansive new commercial development adjacent to Gables Shopping Center.~~ [does the goal need to include text addressing the redevelopment at Gables and along Country Club Drive?]

BACKGROUND

The Miller-Southside neighborhood is located between the pedestrian-friendly commercial zone of the historic downtown and the pedestrian-hostile commercial developments south of Airport Road. These two commercial sectors are connected by South Main Street, which comprises the neighborhood's western edge boundary. Several commercial offices occupy renovated former residences on Main Street. [do we need to add text about Kent Square?]

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Opportunities

- Contiguous, sustainable growth of the town's commercial corridor, Main Street, can enhance the pedestrian experience and provide economic benefits to the town.
- New businesses in proximity to Miller-Southside can provide places for residents to dine, shop, and conduct business.

Challenges

- Business development south of Country Club Drive is too distant from the town center to encourage pedestrian activity.
- Negative or pervasive encroachment of businesses on adjacent residential life is a possibility.
- Rules for Main Street that apply to only one side of the street will be ineffective.

GENERAL POLICIES

- Promote the design of businesses and infrastructure in line with established principals for pedestrian life: narrow streets relative to building heights, businesses oriented to the sidewalks, dense vehicular traffic, parking located behind businesses and relatively little by way of interchanges, expressways and overpasses in or near the commercial center, and housing above retail. The town should align new commercial development on Main Street with that which is already present in downtown (Comprehensive Plan, Community Design, 5 -8).
- Create opportunities for new retail space near downtown (Comprehensive Plan, Economic Development, 32).

DRAFT

- Town and neighborhood economic policy considers the *type* of jobs created by a proposal of growth (not simply the number of jobs.) Full-time jobs that do not offer healthcare and retirement benefits drain community resources in the medium- and long-term. Jobs that pay hourly should offer a “living wage” sufficient to maintain the town’s existing standard of living. This should be considered when offering special use permits and zoning variances to proposed businesses. (Comprehensive Plan, Economic Development, 28)

TOWN ACTION STRATEGIES

- Promote the use of existing renovated houses on Main Street for commercial-office use.
- Promote family-owned, non-chain retail.
- Maintain contiguous commercial growth pattern southward on Main Street from Roanoke Street.
- Consider *both* sides of Main Street as a single entity, under a single set of goals irrespective of neighborhood boundaries.
- As businesses move south on Main Street, the tree plantings, sidewalk detailing, benches, and street lights that demark downtown should extend to the new edge of the commercial district.
- Require a parking-building-sidewalk composition in line with established town policy, *“The sizes of buildings fronting downtown streets are slightly taller than the streets are wide, thus creating an ‘urban’ atmosphere and the sense of hospitable outdoor rooms. Buildings situated on sidewalks with parking located in the rear further enhances this effect, as well as endorses the idea of a community that values people before automobiles. Town policy and practice encourages pedestrian-oriented design by requiring new commercial developments to locate parking behind the front building line, and also by eliminating front setbacks to place the structure closer to the street.”* Apply this criteria to the proposed 38 acre commercial development south-southwest of Gables Shopping Center.

NEIGHBORHOOD ACTION STRATEGIES

- Pursue green buffer space at Draper and Country Club.
- Seek to change circulation pattern for Children’s Nest Daycare. Entrance should be via the commercial road between Plaza One and McCoy funeral home, rather than via the residential street, Draper Road.